1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



cardamum fruit[10] at the time of harvest, and which some Lepchas hope will be converted into an elementary school. A little after this the track shoots sharply upwards, barely indicated by the presence of rocks and felled trees, running through poor and ragged stony ground sparsely sown with maize. The path leads directly to the crest of the hill which is surmounted by a small stone cairn or *choten*, perhaps three thousand feet above the river and five thousand above the sea-level. This cairn is almost opposite the junction of the Teesta and Talung rivers, and from it paths wander west and south, to the different villages of Zongu.

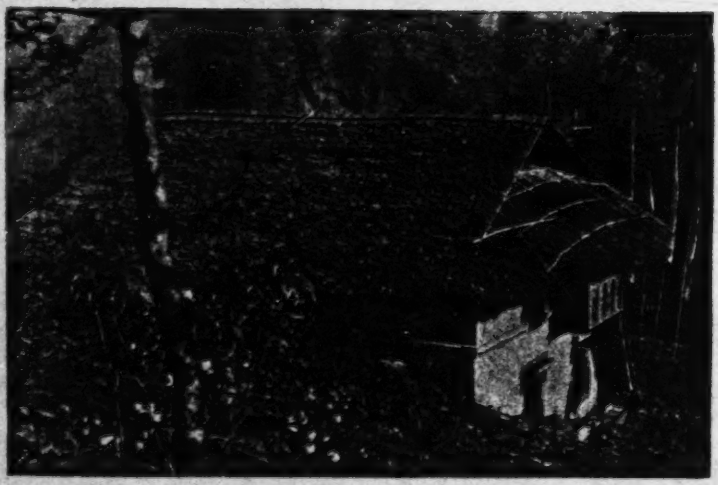
Proceeding westward from the cairn you reach in a couple of miles the small village of Panung; a couple more miles and you come to the village of Lingthem. Without our knowledge—we were only making for Zongu, and until the last hours believed that was the name of a village—it had been arranged that we were to stop there, and the first storey of the monastery had been placed at our disposal, in such a manner that it was almost impossible to refuse. As a place to live in the monastery suffered from several disadvantages; it was extremely cold and draughty, and fires were forbidden because the smoke would defile the images of the Gods; smoking was forbidden, except on the balcony which for my special benefit was temporarily considered outside holy precincts; the place was overrun with rats, which it would have been the greatest possible sin to kill in the monastery, and which could not be driven away supernaturally because none of the lamas knew the correct ritual, which involves the use of sand, ashes, and paper charms; there was never any privacy for at any time people might feel impelled to come to worship the images which were housed in this upper chamber, and regularly at dawn and sunset a young lama came to arrange the altars; and during big monastery feasts sleep was often impossible for two or three nights. But some of these disadvantages had compensating advantages; and as the focal centre of Lingthem, and to a lesser degree of the whole Talung side of Zongu, our living quarters were ideally situated for constant observation.

[10] Cardamum is the money crop of the Lepchas. Cardamum is a spice consisting of the seed-capsules of the perennial plants of a species of *Amomum* and is much used as a stomachic and condiment.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



346



*Above:* LINGTHEM MONASTERY FROM BELOW
*Below:* LINGTHEM MONASTERY FROM ABOVE
Note the prayer flags.

[facing p. 52]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



horse or dog could eat the flesh of man, for all three are similar') 262
and such animals and vegetables as are considered poisonous.

Snakes are regarded with a certain amount of affect, though 825
on the whole with less than might be expected. To see a snake, [787]
particularly the *pamol-beu* (a black non-poisonous snake) approaching you is a bad omen, and should it enter a house it foretells a death in that house within the year. All dreams are meaningful, and snakes in dreams have an ominous significance. Snakes do represent a considerable danger, for they are fairly common, particularly in the lower valley and in the forest, and cultivated land is always surrounded by low scrub and secondary growth in which snakes can and do hide. I was frequently asked for medicine against snake-bite, particularly by hunters, but always as a preventative, for there were no serious cases of snake-bite while I was there, nor did I hear of any fatal ones. The Lepchas know of a dioeceous plant which is [824] believed to cure these bites, but apparently they have not much faith in it. Snakes occur very little in mythology and fable, and [831] have no overt phallic significance; the most common phallic symbol is the maize cob, which is almost a rude word.

ii

Lingthem monastery is a two-storied rectangular building stand- 346 ●
ing on an artificially levelled terrace about 5,500 feet above sea-level, with its principal façade facing north. The first building on the site was erected in 1855 but it has since been rebuilt three times. The first building was made by Panloak, the grandfather of old Serving, the last of his line to be head of the village; the first and second renovations and enlargements were made under the direction of learned lamas who had travelled from Tibet; the third and greatest alteration was made fifteen years ago under the direction of, and to a great extent at the expense of, the Muktair, the dead father of Tafoor and Chudo. The rebuilding was done entirely by local labour in the three winter months, with help from neighbouring villages. The material was paid for chiefly by local subscription helped by donations from the State and the British Political Officer and the structure when completed was free from debt. The monastery however still owes Rs. 600 to Lhassa for the copies of the sacred books, and the heirs of the Muktair still owe money to the money lenders for the sums the Muktair undertook personally for the materials which had to be bought and for the big metal

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



images which he bought from Bhutan to replace the small existing ones. The monasteries are the only occasions in Lepcha life for conspicuous display and ornament and there is a constant feeling of emulation and friendly rivalry between the different villages as to who shall have the largest, most beautiful and best equipped monastery. Until recently that of Lingthem was easily the finest in every way, but in 1937 the people of Gyatong decided to build an even bigger one (in the building of which the people of Lingthem will aid). Although the people of Lingthem hope in time that they will be able to rebuild their monastery so as to be even bigger than the new one at Gyatong they cannot consider doing so yet; but to counterbalance the effort of their neighbours the people of Lingthem are collecting money to replace the present thatched roof with one of corrugated iron. From the aesthetic point of view the change will be an unmitigated disaster, but the present thatch, though pleasant to look at, is inadequate to keep out the almost continuous rain, as the condition of the painted woodwork and hanging pictures on silk (*tang-ku*) shows.

The monastery is made of stone, wood and plaster; the walls are coloured white with a broad band of red (the dye is a clay brought from a considerable distance) and picked out with blue; the windows, doors and porch are made out of wood and are quite pleasantly carved in stylised geometrical patterns. The main place of worship is on the ground floor with the entrance in the middle of the north wall, consisting of a pair of wooden doors. These doors are protected by a built-out porch, on the top of which is a balcony which runs the whole length of the first storey; this porch is enclosed except for a fairly narrow entrance in the centre and on three sides there are inserted prayer wheels[5] about four feet from the ground. These prayer wheels are filled with written prayers or *mantra* inside a wooden drum which is set on spikes so as to revolve freely; the outside of the drum is covered with paper inscribed with a prayer in Len-za script. When the pious approach the monastery they circumambulate it three times, always keeping the

[5] One of the tenets of lamaism is that a prayer repeated mechanically is as valid as one said orally. The two chief mechanisms for mechanical praying are (1) prayer drums filled with written prayers or *mantra*: turning the wheel is equivalent to uttering all the contained prayers, and (2) prayer flags. These are strips of linen stamped with printed prayers; each time the flag flutters in the breeze it is as though the setter-up had said all the prayers printed on it. These devices are described more fully in Chapter Seven, pp. 190–191.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



wall on their right side (as must be done for all lamaist holy places or objects) turning the prayer wheels as they come up to them.

The chief holy place is a large bare room, occupying almost the whole of the ground floor of the building. The interior of the room is empty except for four supporting pillars in the middle of the floor, and two slightly raised seats running in parallel lines from the altar to the door on which the lamas sit during ceremonies. In the centre of the back wall is the altar, inset in a carved wooden frame; on it are three large images, Sangyi Youbami in the centre, flanked by Gamyang Kanché Rimbuché and Chérézi; in front of these larger images are four smaller gods. On either side of the altar are worked wooden pigeon-holes, in which are kept the hundred and eight volumes of the Kangyour, one of the two Tibetan scriptures. These volumes consist of loose leaves bound up in a cloth and fastened between two plain pieces of wood as bindings. Scattered about the room are the various musical instruments which are not in use—drums, gongs and cymbals; the metal instruments similar to trumpets and clarionets, the conch shells and the flutes made out of a human femur are kept either on or before the altar. Every morning at dawn a *kané* (sacristan) places on the altar before the images seven bowls of water for the gods to drink and wash in; every evening at sunset these bowls are emptied and replaced by *chimi*—altar lights, consisting of a small metal container with a wick of bamboo or cloth, filled with melted butter or oil. There also stands on the altar a copper jug containing blessed water (*tyü*) and usually a pair of vases filled with flowers. There are also occasional offerings of cones of ground grain. During important festivals the front of the altar is completely hidden by elaborate constructions, chiefly made out of dough and butter which represent those gods who are being specially worshipped. Anybody approaching this or any other lamaist altar for the first time is meant to prostrate himself three times, standing with joined hands, falling to the knees and then touching the ground with the forehead. After these prostrations no special attention is paid to the altar, and it is quite permissible to turn one's back on it.

To the west of the main room, with a separate entrance also on the north wall, is the *lha-gong*. This is a high and narrow chamber almost entirely filled with four huge prayer wheels, reaching up to the ceiling; indeed the first and biggest of the wheels, which is called Betsa Guru, pierces the ceiling and its top, a cone

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



surmounted with drapery of many colours, stands in the middle of the floor of the storey above. The four prayer-wheels practically touch each other; there is about a yard of free ground between the wheels and the side walls, and a larger space between the doorway and the first wheel. The *lha-gong* is primarily the place of worship of the nuns—*in-é-bu*—and they are meant to be responsible for the services and good order of this place. The big wheels are turned by people sitting down, and there are wooden handles attached to the base which make this operation easier. Each time one of the big wheels completes a revolution a small bell is rung. The wheels are covered with paper of a vaguely Chinese design, representing fantastic flowers and goddesses.

The first storey is approached by an external wooden staircase on the east side. It leads first of all into a corridor with an unused cooking place; at the back of that is a small and completely dark chamber called *tyang-gong* which is employed for mystic fasting and contemplation and also for the weekly ceremony of *kong-so klon* which is performed, at considerable risks, it is believed, to the officiant, to cleanse the monastery and neighbourhood of those devils which are infesting it.

The main first-storey room is very similar to the one below, except that the books and images on the altar are different. This first-floor altar is flanked by a pair of thunder-birds—*sa-dher*—resembling Chinese dragons in silhouette cut out of cardboard. A couple of books are also kept permanently on the altar. To the right of the altar is a cupboard containing the sacred book Rin-chet; this book is treated with great reverence and the cupboard which holds it receives bowls of water and *chimi* as though it were an altar. But none of the lamas of Lingthem can read this book, nor do they know the proper ceremonials which should accompany the reading. On the four supporting columns hang wooden masks such as are worn when 'devil dances' are performed; but these actual masks, though representing named supernaturals, are not made for wearing, nor are dances performed in the monastery. Suspended from the cross-beams—for there is no ceiling and the reed thatch can be seen between the beams—are a number of sacred scroll pictures (*tang-ku*) but they have suffered so much from the weather that they are practically indecipherable.

To the west of the main room, above the *lha-gong* is a lumber room containing paper-presses and other paraphernalia not in constant use. The Lepchas make paper out of the pounded underbark

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



342

346
24

*Above:* A LEPCHA HOUSE

*Below:* A *MOONG LI:* A HOUSE FOR THE 'HOUSE-GOBLIN' *THYAK-DUM*, SITUATED IN A CARDAMUM FIELD; BEHIND ANOTHER HOUSE

[Facing p. 60]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



of two species of daphne (*ri-kan-too* and *dé-nok*) cooked to a pulp and then spread over coarse canvas on stretchers under flowing water. Paper can be made by anyone, either for monastery use or for sale; but since there are no printing blocks in Zongu books have to be sent away to be stamped. For ordinary writing an ink is made out of black earth.

To the front of the monastery is a piece of artificially raised level ground of perhaps fifteen yards depth. It is covered with fairly rough short grass; and at the far edge against the low stone wall are set up a number of prayer flags in memory of the dead, and a few for the benefit of the living. There are one or two small outcrops of rock. All round the building, except in front of the porch, is a narrow flower border in which are grown European flowers, of which seeds or cuttings have been brought from Gangtok—hollyhocks, petunias, sweet william, geraniums, dahlias, and flowering cactuses. In the grass near the wall are several large bushes of small-flowered pink and red roses and some large clumps of hydrangeas. The flowers from these plants are used to decorate the lamaist altar, in preference to the numerous orchids which can be found in the neighbourhood.

Below the monastery wall is a small wood chiefly composed of juniper and *ficus*; about fifty yards from the monastery inside the wood are four *choten* walls—long rectangular stone barrows with stones inscribed with prayers let into the side. The most considerable of these is surmounted by a terra-cotta decoration of a half-moon and three diminishing circles. These *choten* are not funeral piles, nor even cenotaphs; their intention is apotropaic.[6] Some religious ceremonies are performed by the *choten*, particularly those in which both lamas and Mun (the priests of the old Lepcha religion) take part, for the latter are not allowed to officiate within the monastery precincts. The wood is also used as a public latrine during festivals, and animals, particularly pigs and cows, come to pasture there.

To the right of the monastery is an ordinary Lepcha house (except that the entrance is on the west instead of the east side) which is normally the home of the monastery custodian who looks after the garden and ground. He has a small garden (*sing*) in front of the house and also one or two little enclosures with

[6] I am employing the term *apotropaic* for all religious actions whose aim is preventative rather than curative. The *choten* are to keep devils away, not to expel those already present.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



much relation to what the other workers are doing. Men, women and children all work together, and the task proceeds in a rather haphazard fashion, to the accompaniment of a constant fire of jokes, most of them obscene. When the work is finished all those who have helped are given a feast.

Attached to some households and fields is an ambivalent supernatural called *Thyak-dum* (white head). If this supernatural is good-tempered and contented he will bring health and prosperity to the home, and possibly, though people are not so sure about this, punish marauders in the family's fields; if he is angry he will bring disease and loss to the people who neglect him. Consequently when people live in a new house they must find out if *Thyak-dum* lives there, and if so, if they can control him. His whereabouts are discovered by a Mun going into meditation and seeing his presence mystically. If the house-owners can control *Thyak-dum* they will burn butter and incense leaves on some embers, and then sprinkle these embers with water and tell the supernatural to go away. If this fails they will make the *lafét* sacrifice (this sacrifice recurs constantly in the ceremonies of the Mun). On a wicker winnowing tray are placed banana leaves, and on top of them three rows of ground corn, and pieces of ginger, wild bird and dried fish; this offering is dedicated by a Mun who also offers *chi* in a cup ceremonially buttered; after which the sacrifice is taken to the top of some high place and left there, uneaten.

In some houses however it is divided that though *Thyak-dum* is present the house-owner cannot control him. In such cases a little house has to be built for him, standing in the fields near the house. This 'devil's house' consists of a miniature Lepcha house about two feet wide, thatched and made of bamboo, raised about four feet off the ground on four bamboos. Nobody except the sacrificer (preferably a Mun, but any man who knows how and is not a lama will do) must touch, or even go too near this 'devil's house'; were anyone to do so they would become seriously ill. Twice a year, when the barley and when the rice is ripe, sacrifices must be placed inside this devil's house; the sacrifice consists of the fresh grain, together with meat, fish and silver money. When the new sacrifice is made the old one is removed and thrown away; the money however can be taken back into use. Besides these sacrifices a special pig must be kept penned for *Thyak-dum*; this pig is always called the pig of *Thyak-dum*. When it gets old it must be replaced by a young piglet; the old one is killed, and its cooked

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



ntestines—the heart, liver and lungs, the *shafot*—are cooked with ice and offered to *Thyak-dum* together with three *patyoot* of fresh *hi*. *Thyak-dum* is partially attached to the house, and partially to he inhabitants thereof; that is to say that people coming into a new ouse would have to exorcise him were they able to do so; but if he old inhabitants had moved to another dwelling *Thyak-dum* would accompany them, spending most of his time with them, ut occasionally returning to his and their old home. This last oint is almost purely theoretical, for it very very seldom happens hat Lepchas change their homes. If a house proved consistently nlucky, with many people dying and nothing prospering, and f it were divined that the house was the cause of these disasters, he survivors might move; but although some houses in Lingthem ad had far more than their share of death and misfortune the inhabi- ants still stayed in them. The only reason for which houses were ctually abandoned was loneliness, because the few survivors referred to live with relations rather than cope with the work lone.

V

In front of each Lepcha house is a field fenced in with bamboo; is called the garden (*sing*), and in it are raised those vegetables nd roots which are used for flavouring food. These however are nly grown in small quantities on the edge, and the greater part of he field is sown with grain crops; first of all barley and spring wheat mixed, which ripens in April, and subsequently maize. This arden is the only portion of Lepcha land which receives animal anure; it is against the house, under which domestic animals helter at night; their dung is collected and thrown over the fence. t the bottom of nearly every garden is a plantation of bamboos, ultivated so as to have an easily available supply of this invaluable aterial. Near the house too are usually a small number of fruit ees—oranges, peaches, apples, pears, plums, tree-tomatoes—and ccasionally one or two shrubs, usually roses, are grown for their lowers.

The rest of the land of the household is scattered all over the urrounding district, and it is seldom that people own the land ear their house. All possess some strips of land—often more han a dozen for a single household—on the warmer lower slopes f the valley, where the climate is suitable for the cultivation of vet rice, cardamum, and some of the earlier millets or eleusines.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



142
291
346
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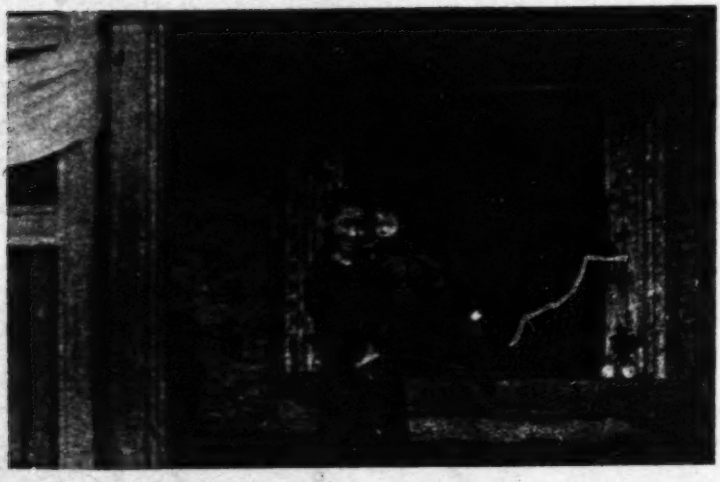


PARENTS AND CHILDREN

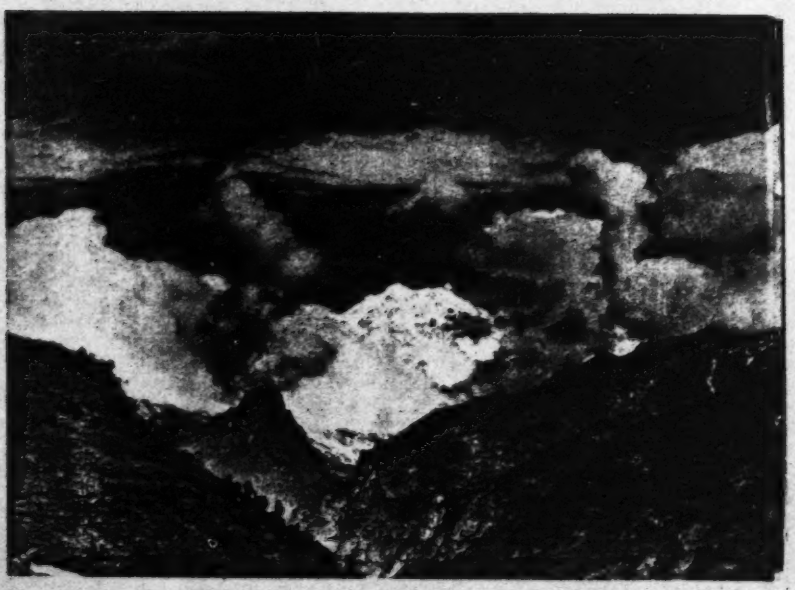
*Above :* Chudo with his youngest daughter in the monastery porch.
*Below :* Tafoor, his wife, Chimpet, the eldest and youngest daughter.

[facing p. 294]

346
133

Lingtem Monastery.

133



Storm clouds over Kinchinjunga.

[facing p. 17]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



the top of Kinchinjunga to the far banks of the Teesta, which we could see churning away a thousand feet below us. To which village did we wish to go? Our informant rattled off the names of the numerous alternatives with machine-gun rapidity, but so far as I was concerned one place was as good as another. I said that I wanted a large village and one where the houses were all close together, since this would facilitate work and enable us to camp in the middle. In answer to this it appeared that there were two possible alternatives: Lingtem and Lungden. The former was said to possess a fine new monastery, whereas Lungden had none; also it was slightly larger and a bit more inaccessible. I plumped for Lingtem, monasteries being very much in my line, and thither we decided to go the following morning.

Very early the next morning Palden came to my bedside. During the night he had been talking to the villagers (they are constantly in and out of Mangen), and they were not so certain that they wanted us now that they realised we wished to stay in Lingtem for at least some months. They were suspicious of our motives, so he said, and were afraid that we had come to enlist them for some sort of service elsewhere. He also said that he was unable to allay their suspicions, since he himself, to be quite frank, was a bit uncertain about it all.

The Jongu people had of course seen plenty of Europeans. Most of them went from time to time to Gangtok, and many had been as far afield as Kalimpong and Darjeeling: also on several occasions the members of the various Kinchinjunga expeditions had passed through their valley; but this was a very different matter from settling down to stay for months in one village.

Amongst the Lingtem men was one Tempa who, I discovered, spoke Nepali fluently: also he was a man of some position in the village. I sent for him. I told him why we had come: that we Europeans had made a sorry mess of the business of living: that we had forgotten to a great extent what it meant to be happy. I told him also that at one time the people of Europe, too, had lived lives as free and

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



I suspect that geologists would find this explanation unacceptable: but in Lingtem there are no geologists; and as for me, I prefer the Lepcha story. It is a good example of their way of thinking and will serve as an introduction to what is to follow.

We reached Lingtem in an hour from the pass and found the headman waiting for us with a gift of eggs and milk. He told us we might live in the monastery itself; but this had the disadvantage that one might not smoke inside the building. Eventually, however, the Mandal said it would be all right providing there was no smoking in the actual rooms where the images are kept; so we decided to move in straight away.

For want of a better word in the English language the Lamaist *gompa* is generally described as a monastery, though such places can in no way be compared with the religious institutions known by that name in Europe. The inmates of *gompas* are sometimes celibates (but seldom so in Sikkim) and most monasteries own property: but apart from this there is, as Mme David-Neel, the eminent Tibetan scholar and traveller, has pointed out, hardly anything in common between the Christian and the Lamaist religious orders.

The Lingtem monastery is about sixty feet square and has two storeys. In appearance it is almost identical with the ordinary Lepcha house, except for its greater size, and the broad band of red ochre round its walls, which denotes that it is a sacred building. The lower floor contains the main hall, which is used regularly for services. Here there is a big altar containing many gilded images, with a specially fine one of Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava, who first introduced Buddhism into Tibet) in the centre. In front of the images there are always seven small bowls of water, in order that the gods may wash and drink. These are emptied at dusk and refilled again at dawn. When the water is taken away it is replaced by one or more tiny wicks, floating in either butter or oil, which give a faint glimmer like a night-light. On special occasions there will be dozens of these

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



lights; grain and flowers are also offered to the gods from time to time.

On either side of the altar are pigeon-holes, in which the 222 volumes of the Teng-gyur (the great Commentary on the Lamaist Scriptures) are stored, the actual scripture itself, the Kang-gyur as it is called (108 volumes), being stored in the upstairs room which we used as a bedroom. There are no chairs in the monastery, the Lamas* (here called Yukman) sitting cross-legged on planks on the floor, which are arranged in two lines running at right angles to the altar. The head Lama, or Dorje Lopön, has a rough sort of seat on which he, too, sits cross-legged. This, however, is raised a little above the level of the floor.

The main hall takes up most of the ground floor, but at one end there is a room, only about nine feet wide, which in addition to a small altar, complete with image, houses three enormous prayer-drums, which ring a bell each time they are turned completely round. These drums, or perhaps barrels would be a better word, are about ten feet high, and each is completely filled with strips of paper on which the magic formula *Om mane padme hum* has been written over and over again. One turn of the drum is equivalent to uttering this mystic sentence the same number of times that it has been written on the paper within. When one has nothing better to do, therefore, a quiet half-hour of turning a giant prayer-wheel is as good a means of acquiring merit as any other. People would often drop in at odd moments to do this.

The largest of the three drums had a rather elaborate top that projected through the ceiling into a small room above, which we used as a bathroom. This top was decorated with a muslin flounce of red, blue, and yellow and looked something like a rather dirty ballet skirt. When the drum was turned

*The term Lama should rightly only be applied to a monk who has reached a certain definite standing in the Buddhist church by reason of his learning and piety. It is extremely doubtful if anyone in Lingtem has any claim to this title; but since the term is commonly, though quite incorrectly, used by most Western writers to denote any Lamaist monk, and since the Lepchas themselves use it in this way, I have decided to follow the general practice.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



from below the top would also revolve; and if one happened to be having a bath at the same time the effect was rather startling until we grew accustomed to expect it. A flange projected from the rim of the drum, and this struck a bell at every turn, thus enabling the worshipper to keep a count, for it would be unwise to finish with an inauspicious number. It had a tinkling sound like the bell in a village shop; and I had only to hear it to be immediately transported to the English countryside.

The upper storey was reached by an outside staircase and contained three rooms. The largest was more or less identical with the main hall below, and also contained an altar, complete with images and books. There were also several fearsome-looking masks, said to represent Lord Konchen, which were used for dances. This room was used as a general store-room: in one corner were a number of printing blocks and apparatus for making paper, also odds and ends of ceremonial equipment, coloured umbrellas, peacocks' feathers, and such-like. Some of the pillars were roughly carved, and decorated with crudely coloured dragon designs. The ceiling was unplastered, and on the beams above a number of immense copper vessels and cooking pots were stored. This was our bedroom, and it always reminded me of the backstage of a theatre set for a Christmas pantomime. It would never have surprised me to see a *Corps de Ballet* come tripping into the room; and when the light was put out the last thing one saw, before dropping off to sleep, was the gilded face of the large central Buddha faintly gleaming in the light of the flickering wick. In the morning we would usually awake to the pattering sound of a bare-footed novice, whose duty it was to refill the seven altar-bowls with water.

There was another small room, little bigger than a cell, which was used by certain monks for the purpose of private meditation. It was only about nine feet square, and its solitary window was heavily swathed in sacking, so as to exclude every particle of light. From time to time one

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



special Lama would come and meditate alone in this completely darkened room. He would sometimes intone for hours at a stretch, accompanying his prayers on the cymbals and drum. After several hours of this rhythmical banging one's nerves would come near to breaking point. The only thing then was to go for a solitary walk. This particular form of devotion is known as *Kongso Klong*, or the "sending away of Devils," and this was the name we eventually gave to its chief exponent. I later discovered that our presence in the monastery was thought to call for redoubled efforts in this direction, but I was not prepared for what happened on the day of my final departure. On this occasion Kongso Klong appeared before me with the usual present of eggs. I thought he had merely come to say good-bye, and was somewhat astonished when the others told me that he demanded ten rupees "for services rendered." This I paid.

Between the Kongso room and our bedroom was a short passage, which contained a large open fire-place for cooking. This was identical with that in the ordinary living house, but during our time it was never used. For dining-room we had a tent. This was pitched outside the small house adjoining the monastery, which served both as kitchen and living quarters for our servants. It was normally occupied by Pong Ring, a snuffling old gentleman and almost blind. He was a sort of verger and was supposed to keep the monastery clean and to tend its tiny garden. All this, however, was far beyond him and he seldom appeared. Sometimes on sunny days he would drag himself painfully down and would totter senilely round the building, at the same time turning his prayer-wheel and wheezing like a pug. When he felt up to it he would take a turn at the giant drums and his accompanying prayers sounded to me like the swarming of bees. Everyone treated him kindly; but the poor old man had outlived his time. He said he had once had a wife, but never a child to look after him in his extreme old age. Sometimes, when we were talking to others, he would pause in his circumambulations and stare

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



though walking about was almost as difficult as on a swinging suspension-bridge. At last we were by ourselves; there was no communication between the two rooms except from the outside, but there were so many chinks in the walls that we thought it advisable to improvise a screen with our rugs and shawls, and then we were able to change our wet clothes and hang them on the many bamboos crossed above the fireplace to be dried and well smoked! We were not a little horrified to find that our feet and ankles were covered with leeches. I got off fairly well, but my husband, who had walked nearly all day, had at least twenty on him. I had knocked two off his neck before, and now he found one in his hair. When empty their bodies were like long black threads about the thickness of vermicelli, but when full of blood they were huge, soft, black lumps. It was most repulsive to have them taken off one. These hill-leeches are much smaller and darker in colour than the domestic leech, but the bite must be poisonous in some way, for, although not felt at the time, they cause considerable irritation of the skin for many weeks afterwards."

*Ibid.*

*Monasteries.*

"There is a great similarity in all these buildings, but the Pemiongchi *goompa* is larger than most of them, though the outside seemed less interesting to us, because it had a corrugated iron roof. There were also common glass window-panes round one of the altars. Inside was a great wealth of ugly idols and hideous masks, and it was painful to see our Nepalese coolie prostrating himself with awed face before the latter. Some of the frescoes on the walls were particularly gaudy and revolting; the lamas we saw here were of a low order, and had not the attractive faces we had sometimes met with among these Buddhist priests. To add to the generally unfavourable opinion we had received, some cooking vessels carried by Teptook, and which he had respectfully left at the door when he went in, were stolen,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

793
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Inebus performing their ceremony of circumambulating the monastery.

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Hlatam, the alleged poisoner.

Domestic altar in the private house of a Lama. Note the reserve store of maize hanging from the rafters on the left; and on the right a hurricane lantern, one of the treasures of the house.

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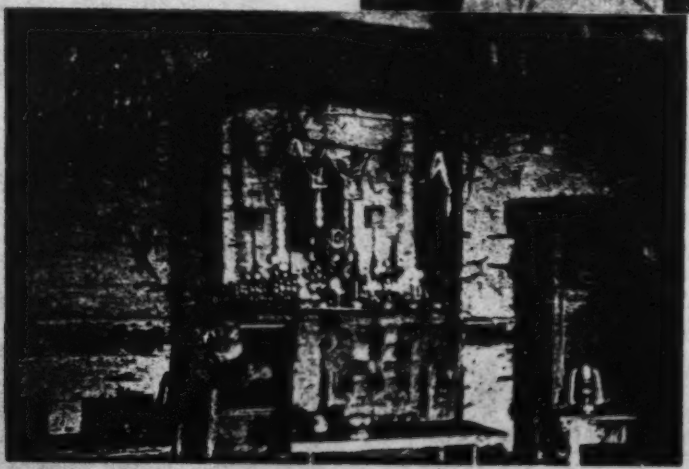

[facing p. 77]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

# CHAPTER 8

## Houses and House-building

342 THE ordinary Lepcha house is extremely simple and generally contains but two rooms, one of which is used as a kitchen. In appearance it does not differ, except in size, from the monastery, which I take to be the prototype of Sikkim domestic architecture.

174 346 It seems likely that in Tibet the original monasteries also served as forts, as is often still the case. In view of the unsettled state of that country there was need for the people to keep close together; so that instead of living in scattered houses they all lived together inside the forts. As conditions became more peaceful the need to live in close proximity to others became gradually less urgent, but when the people came to build their own houses it was natural that they should take the local fort or monastery as their model, since they had none other. I am not suggesting that this also happened in Sikkim; and the transition in Tibet had probably taken place long before the Lepchas took to living in permanent houses. Sikkim, however, has always been in [177] 341 close cultural contact with Tibet; and in no way is the influence of the latter country more marked than in the local style of architecture. The extremely wet climate of Sikkim has of course made certain modifications necessary. Of these the most striking is the wide overhanging roof, which often projects as much as fifteen feet in front of the walls. It is one of the most pleasing features of all Sikkim houses, and has the additional advantage of keeping the walls completely dry throughout the rainy season.

In Tibet, monasteries, and in fact most houses, are usually built with very thick walls: they are sometimes as much as ten feet thick at the base. It is improbable that such thickness

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Lamas preparing the *tormas* which will later be offered to Kinchinjunga.

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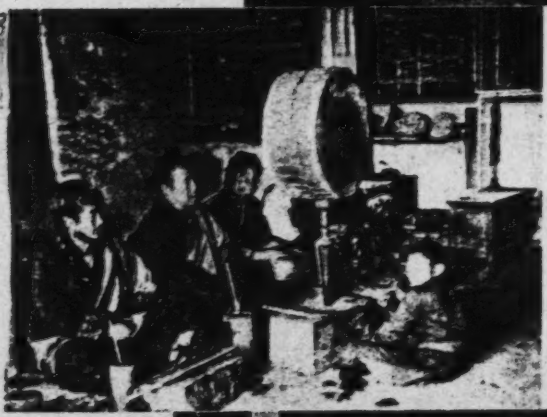

Lamas at worship. The duty of the novice is to beat the large drum, in front of which he is sitting. Note the bamboo container of *chi* by the side of each Lama.

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At the conclusion of the service the offering is brought out and exhibited to Kinchinjunga.

[FACING p. 274]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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The *Boom Kor* ceremony. The procession about to leave Lingtem monastery.

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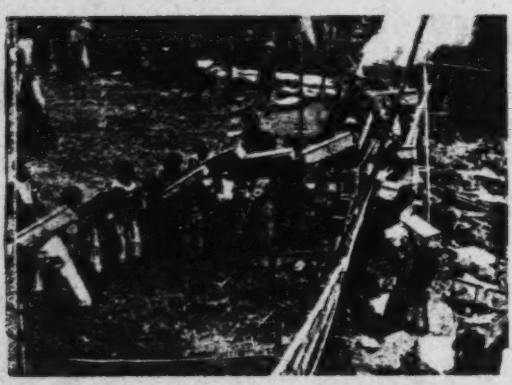

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The sacred books starting off on their journey round the district. Each volume is carried by a woman.

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Small image of Guru Rimpoche, over which a bell-shaped "umbrella" is held, and pot of holy water being carried in the procession.

[Facing p. 290]